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Extended Abstract

An Investigation into the Implementation of the “Gooya Class” Program from the Perspectives of Preschool Principals and Teachers in Mahabad County

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Introduction

Despite remarkable scientific and technological advancements, modern humans face numerous challenges in maintaining psychological well-being and life balance, highlighting the importance of life skills education. These competencies-including self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and problem-solving-collectively referred to as “life skills,” play a vital role in preventing individual and social harm and in promoting overall health (Khanifar & Pourhosseini, 2012; World Health Organization, 1994). The development of such skills is closely linked to the advancement of language abilities, which form the foundation for human interaction, learning, emotional growth, and social communication (Hartas, 2012).

In Iran’s education system, the teaching of the four fundamental language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) represents a primary objective of Persian language instruction, requiring purposeful content and logical sequencing (Najafi Pāzooki, 2016; Supreme Council for Education, 2012). The early years of life are particularly critical in establishing these skills (Mohammadinejad, 2016).

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UNICEF, by reviewing theoretical frameworks developed prior to the 1980s, identified a set of approaches underpinning life skills education, including behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism, humanism, Bandura's social learning theory (1977), problem–behavior theory, social influence theory, and resilience theory (UNICEF, 2012). Despite their differences, these perspectives collectively provide a comprehensive framework for explaining behavioral determinants and designing preventive strategies, contributing significantly to health education and life skills promotion (World Health Organization, 2003).

In the field of language acquisition, several influential theories have been proposed. Skinner's behaviorist theory (1957) regards language learning as a product of operant conditioning; Piaget's cognitive theory (1969) links language development to cognitive growth; and Bandura's social learning theory (1977) emphasizes observation and modeling. Chomsky's nativist theory (1986) highlights the existence of innate linguistic structures in children (as cited in Arabi Jonaghani et al., 2017; Papalia et al., 2013; Mojib & Fazayeli, 2023). Collectively, these perspectives demonstrate that both language learning and life skills acquisition are interactive and multidimensional processes shaped by cognitive, social, environmental, and innate factors.

Based on this understanding, the "Gooya Class" program adopts an integrative approach, aiming to teach life skills and language skills simultaneously during the preschool period. Research indicates that such integrated instruction can enhance academic performance and foster holistic development (Momeni et al., 2024; Saljughi et al., 2023; Mehdikhanlou & Nourabadi, 2022; Izan & Ahmadi Aliabadi, 2022; Rahimi Golougahi & Bakhtiari Markiyeh, 2021). While some prior studies share similarities with the present work, none have specifically examined the integration of these domains in preschool education through an analysis of the perspectives of "Gooya Class" program implementers. This study seeks to address this gap by identifying the facilitating factors, obstacles, and challenges encountered in the program's practical implementation. Accordingly, it offers a distinct contribution by focusing on the firsthand insights of educational practitioners during this critical developmental stage.

Methodology

This applied research employed a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the experiences of principals and teachers implementing the "Gooya Class" program in preschools across Mahabad County. Thirteen participants were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling until data saturation was reached. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow participants to share their experiences in depth and freely. The trustworthiness of the study was ensured through expert review, iterative coding, and independent analysis by two

researchers. Data analysis followed a process of immersion in the transcripts, thematic coding, clustering of subthemes, and synthesis into overarching themes.

Findings

The analysis identified 18 key themes that facilitated successful implementation of the program, including teacher competence, adaptation to individual and regional differences, motivation and incentives, employment of female teachers, teacher autonomy, professional development, use of interactive teaching methods, curriculum alignment with goals, skill-oriented content, ongoing assessment, collaboration among school staff, strong parent–school partnerships, parents' educational level, families' economic capacity, adequate facilities and budgets, organizational support from the Ministry of Education, familiarization with program goals, and appropriate timing of implementation.
Conversely, major challenges emerged and categorized as follows:

- Human Resource Challenges: shortage of trained staff, limited of professional development, excessive workload, low teacher motivation, unfamiliarity with the program.
- Organizational Barriers: inadequate institutional support, weak managerial oversight, bureaucratic restrictions, and inconsistent policy follow-up.
- Material and Structural Constraints: inadequate facilities, overcrowded classrooms, unsuitable private preschool buildings.
- Pedagogical Issues: overemphasis on reading and writing at the expense of speaking and listening, neglect of affective and psychomotor domains, reliance on outdated teaching methods.
- Socio-Economic Barriers: limited family financial resources, low parental literacy levels.

Conclusion

The "Gooya Class" program demonstrates strong potential to enhance preschoolers' language proficiency and life skills when supported by qualified educators, interactive pedagogical approaches, and sufficient institutional support. However, its effective implementation is constrained by shortages in human resources, limited training opportunities, material inadequacies, and policy-level challenges.
Furthermore, this study was confined to Mahabad County and encountered limitations such as partial participant cooperation, reluctance to record interviews, and individual contextual factors that may have influenced the accuracy and generalizability of the findings.
To mitigate these challenges, the following strategies are recommended:

- Curriculum Adaptation: Align instructional content with local cultural and linguistic contexts while ensuring balance among the four language skills and life skills components.
- Capacity Building: Provide continuous, practice-oriented professional development to enhance teachers' pedagogical competence.
- Strengthened Partnerships: Promote active parental engagement through orientation workshops and sustained communication between schools and families.
- Comparative Research: Conduct cross-national studies of similar programs to identify effective models for integrated language and life skills education at the preschool level.
- Regional Studies: Replicate the study in diverse regions across the country to examine cultural, linguistic, and social variations in the implementation of the "Gooya Class" program.

These recommendations aim to optimize program effectiveness, contribute to national early childhood education reforms, and promote further comparative research within varied cultural and educational contexts.

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